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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses GAELIC (Gauteng and Environs Library Consortium), a regional consortium of South African higher education libraries with the vision of creating a virtual library by linking together autonomous libraries via networks. Topics covered include: (1) GAELIC objectives; (2) selection of INNOPAC as the common library system for GAELIC libraries; (3) VAT (Value Added Tax) exemption; (4) connectivity, including the telecommunications network, Internet connectivity, and links to an INNOPAC union database; (5) implementation of Phase 1--conversion by six libraries to the new automated system; (6) resource sharing; (7) cataloging task group; (8) formal agreements; (9) strategic partnerships with UNINET (i.e., the academic network in South Africa), SABINET (South African Bibliographic and Information Network), and FRELICO (Free State Libraries and Information Consortium); and (10) benefits of belonging to GAELIC. (MES)

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GAELIC : CONSORTIAL STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVAL

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Background

GAELIC, the Gauteng and Environs Library Consortium, had its origins in a meeting of senior administrators, library directors, and IT representatives from seven tertiary institutions in Gauteng, with representatives of the Andrew W Mellon Foundation, on 3 February 1996. We were informed that the Mellon Foundation would be willing to fund the purchase of a common library software package for a consortium of libraries in the area, to facilitate and support resource sharing. The consortium was invited to submit a proposal to the Foundation.
FOTIM, the Foundation of Tertiary Institutions in the Northern Metropolis, had been established a few months earlier, and GAELIC was brought in under this academic umbrella body. Librarians generally saw this as a positive step towards greater understanding and support for their libraries by the senior administrations of FOTIM institutions.

The first meeting of the GAELIC Steering Committee took place on 15 April, 1996. By this time membership of the consortium had grown to eleven tertiary institutions located in this commercial and industrial heartland of South Africa. A management structure was established, several task groups were set up, and hard work began in a number of areas.

At this time membership consisted of the Medical University of Southern Africa, Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, Rand Afrikaans University, Technikon Northern Gauteng, Technikon Pretoria, Technikon Southern Africa, Technikon Witwatersrand, University of Pretoria, University of South Africa, University of the Witwatersrand, and Vista University. Subsequently the University of the North West and the Vaal Triangle Technikon have joined GAELIC, bringing our membership to thirteen. It is possible that this number may increase in the future.

The Mission of GAELIC is to fully utilise and develop the information resources of the region for the purpose of promoting education, research and lifelong learning amongst its clients, as a contribution to development in South Africa.

Our Vision is to create a virtual library by linking together autonomous libraries via networks.

Our major Objectives are:

- to promote resource sharing and enhance access to information;
- to utilise appropriate and up-to-date technology and to keep abreast of new technological developments;
- to improve information literacy among clients and to share training resources and expertise where appropriate;
- to build links with other types of libraries in the region;
- to involve all interest groups through contact and collaboration; and
- to contribute towards the provision of information for the development of South Africa.

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Having worked together in an informal way for many years but having also in the past been very conscious of institutional independence and autonomy, GAELIC members are now working together towards a culture of co-operation.

Common Library Software

The Mellon Foundation's emphasis on common software and resource sharing provided an immediate focus for the activities of GAELIC. Several libraries were either planning the purchase of a new library system, or becoming increasingly disenchanted with their existing systems. The University of South Africa (UNISA) had drawn up system specifications during 1994/1995, had visited sites and vendors locally and overseas, and had done a preliminary assessment. UNISA was agreeable to sharing this information and its shortlist of vendors with GAELIC, thereby saving the consortium a great deal of work.

During May and June 1996 these specifications were expanded to meet consortial requirements. A Request for Information (RFI) was sent to four overseas and two local software vendors. Responses were carefully assessed, and two vendors were invited to come to South Africa to demonstrate their systems. Library and IT staff from all member institutions were invited, and those who work with particular modules (for example circulation or cataloguing) were encouraged to attend relevant sessions. When the system decision was finally made, we were satisfied that the selection process had been thorough and democratic.

In August, INNOPAC, developed by Innovative Interfaces Inc. (III) was unanimously chosen as the common software package for GAELIC. Six libraries wished to implement as soon as possible - now known as Phase 1. Remaining members, for various reasons, decided to wait a year or so before changing to INNOPAC.

Our Proposal was submitted to the Mellon Foundation in October 1996. In November, price negotiations took place with III, and on 6 December, only 8 months from inception, GAELIC was awarded a generous grant by the Mellon Foundation for Phase 1 implementation. We were assured by the Foundation that a proposal for Phase 2 would be welcomed as soon as we were ready.

Two conditions required resolving before the Foundation would release the bulk of the grant. Firstly, it did not wish to pay 14% value added tax (VAT), but wanted the full value of the grant to benefit the libraries concerned. Secondly, very aware of the high cost of connectivity in South Africa, the Foundation requested that some resolution be sought with Telkom, the local monopolistic telecommunications company, regarding reduced network tariffs for tertiary education.

CALICO (the Cape Library Cooperative) had been awarded a similar grant under the same conditions, and it was agreed between the two consortia that CALICO would take the lead on the Telkom/connectivity issue, and GAELIC on the VAT exemption issue.

VAT Exemption

On the advice of a reputable firm of accountants, and with the assistance of an advocate on the staff of one of the member institutions, FOTIM's Constitution was amended to clarify its status as an "association not-for-gain" rather than a "trust", and GAELIC became a "committee" of FOTIM. The tax laws in South Africa rule that tax exemption may be granted on donated goods received by a not-for-gain association, but not on donated services. The accountants felt that a case could be made for exemption on the hardware, which would be classified as goods, but not on the software, which would be regarded as services. GAELIC put forward a strong argument that in the case of a library system, the goods were no use without the services, and vice versa. The two were inextricably linked. The Commissioner for Inland Revenue was persuaded that this was in fact so, and VAT exemption was granted on the total value of the donation. This information and copies of relevant documentation have been shared with other library consortia in South Africa that either already have or are hoping to receive funding from the Mellon Foundation.

Connectivity

Good connectivity is of course critical to the success of any hi-tech library system, and to regional and national resource sharing. All data links in South Africa are supplied by Telkom, a profit-making parastatal organisation, under government regulation. This monopoly will exist for at least another three years. Problems had been experienced frequently with Telkom's service, and the bandwidth was neither fast, reliable, nor affordable. All GAELIC sites are linked via UNINET, the academic network in South Africa, which is dependent on Telkom and which fought long and hard to have its backbone lines upgraded recently to 2 and 4Mb. Campus access to UNINET varies considerably within GAELIC, and several members need to upgrade their campus networks in order that successful resource sharing, electronic data transfer, and Internet access may take place.

Internet connectivity at tertiary institutions is generally via UNINET, is thus Telkom-based, and the cost is high. Unlike the situation in many overseas countries, Telkom doesn't offer any educational discounts, and several institutions are either limiting or charging for Internet usage by students and staff in order to contain costs. Some GAELIC sites have opted to use commercial Internet service providers for their overseas links. Telkom was recently involved in a bid to control Internet traffic, and the matter is currently being addressed in the courts.

Talks between Telkom, CALICO and GAELIC began last year, and are ongoing. From these has emerged the Virtual Library Project, a visionary proposal which, if accepted and funded by Government, will make information and the Internet accessible to schools and community libraries throughout South Africa. It is expected that tertiary libraries would have a major role to play, as they hold the majority of the country's information. However, it remains to be seen what immediate benefits will be forthcoming for tertiary education in the form of reduced bandwidth costs.

Fortunately the Mellon Foundation is not holding up grants pending a satisfactory conclusion to all this. It is aware of the effort that is going into negotiations with Telkom and the Government, and in fact has taken the lead in the United States in bringing together a number of large foundations interested in seeking solutions to the connectivity problem affecting tertiary education in South Africa.

Back at grass roots level, GAELIC's system implementation consists of separate local INNOPAC installations at each of the six sites, which will link via UNINET to an INNOPAC union database. Careful consideration was given to the system architecture. Although more expensive, a distributed system was chosen in order to lower the amount of network traffic on UNINET and our dependence on Telkom, and also to cater for institutional autonomy and differences - always a sensitive issue. We didn't want our smaller partners to feel dominated in any way by the larger institutions when it came to setting parameters for the system. III agreed to accommodate this architecture within the budget available, and the decision has already paid dividends in that matters which might have taken long hours of negotiation between member institutions have been settled locally.

Implementation of Phase 1

Recognising how difficult is for the educational sector to hire and retain good technical expertise, GAELIC contracted SABINET Online to host the GAELIC union database, to undertake data conversion from SAMARC to USMARC, and to provide us with a project management service. In addition, a System Implementation Management Committee has worked extremely hard, taking responsibility for issues such as data conversion and clean-up, implementation schedules, training programs, and installation and implementation of the system at each site. The situation was made more difficult in that some of the Phase 1 institutions had been left ?high and dry? by local vendors, existing systems were no longer being maintained, and such vendors were of little help with complex data conversion problems. However, hard work on the part of the Implementation Committee and good advice from experts at III paid off, and we are satisfied that the bibliographic data of GAELIC Phase 1 is of a high and internationally acceptable standard.

Phase 2

A Proposal for funding for Phase 2 was submitted recently to the Andrew Mellon Foundation. We shall be advised of the outcome on 8 June 1998. GAELIC is meanwhile moving ahead with implementation plans for the six Phase 2 libraries.

Resource Sharing

Resource sharing is the responsibility of our largest task group, which operates via four sub-task groups: Joint Acquisitions, Human Resources, Document Supply and Serials.

The Joint Acquisitions team is investigating electronic media as the most viable option for joint collection development and resource sharing. Donor funding has been obtained for the purchase of a year's subscription to two full-text web-based databases, which are currently being used and evaluated by GAELIC members. We aim ultimately to optimise the spending power of GAELIC members through negotiating competitive consortium pricing.

The Human Resources group is providing regional support and training for GAELIC members, particularly in the area of IT, but also in areas such as negotiation skills, management of change and labour law.

Document Supply has existed among libraries for decades. To improve document delivery within GAELIC, Ariel software has been installed at all member institutions, and we hope shortly to achieve a 2 working day turnaround time. Funding will be sought to install additional Ariel workstations in branch libraries on campuses, to further improve response times.

The Serials Workgroup is, predictably, looking at the rationalisation of resources, joint purchases of expensive material, and collection development in the Gauteng region and ultimately nationally.

Resource Sharing is core to the mission and objectives of GAELIC, and the work of these teams is very important. Skilled staff from relevant departments in all our libraries meet regularly, combining their knowledge and experience, getting to know their colleagues, and contributing to the progress of GAELIC.

Cataloguing Task Group

This group works to ensure a high bibliographic standard of all records, not only on each member library's local catalogue, but on the GAELIC union database too. Workflow in technical processing departments, staff training, shared cataloguing, and copy cataloguing from databases such as OCLC's PromptCat are being investigated and promoted.

Formal Agreements

A year after inception, we had to stop and take stock of where we were at in GAELIC, what our expectations were, and what we could expect of our partners. Six Phase 1 libraries were vigorously moving ahead with system implementation, and GAELIC was embarking on a number of joint projects requiring financial contribution from participating members. Mutual reliance was becoming important, and written agreement was needed to identify exactly what was being committed to. The formulation of business plans for all GAELIC projects had become necessary.

In addition to customary contracts and agreements, a Common System Agreement has been signed by members using the INNOPAC software and related hardware, and deals with the relationship between GAELIC and these libraries regarding the system software, performance levels, training, hardware, financial obligations and ownership. An Addendum to GAELIC's original Memorandum of Agreement sets out the rights and duties of members, the management structure of GAELIC and the powers and composition of its various committees.
Much work has gone into setting up these formal structures which we hope will enable GAELIC to operate smoothly and without misunderstanding as we become more diverse and complex. They are

vitally important as we move into the areas of joint acquisition, journal rationalisation, and contribution to the GAELIC union database.

Strategic Partnerships

From inception, GAELIC resolved to make use of existing infrastructures in South Africa, rather than duplicating effort. To this end we are using UNINET to link our member libraries, and are working closely with SABINET Online regarding services such as project management and the union database. We hope that the GAELIC union database will form the basis of a new, high quality South African national union catalogue. The Director of the State Library has been an observer on our Steering Committee since inception, and members of his staff participate in the work of the task groups. The CSIR (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research) has initiated discussion with GAELIC regarding the possibility of a strategic partnership.

We are in close contact with other consortia in South Africa, and have worked particularly closely with FRELICO, the Free State Library Consortium. Its two major tertiary members, the University of the Free State and the Technikon Free State, are purchasing INNOPAC software, will become nodes of GAELIC, and will contribute to the union database. GAELIC supports the national consideration of certain issues rather than regional as we feel that our country is too small to accommodate the duplication of major resources and initiatives.

Benefits of belonging to GAELIC

Membership of a consortium such as GAELIC provides an opportunity for the sharing of scarce resources - financial, human and material. In fact it is believed to be the only way libraries can manage the economic hardships that have become part of our lives. We are not looking at choices here, but at survival.

GAELIC has been hard work for all involved. However, the benefits are many, they justify our existence, and encourage our commitment. We feel we have a better chance of attracting donor money as a consortium than as thirteen individual institutions. Immediate access to the combined resources of GAELIC will benefit teaching and research in the region. Sharing staff expertise, development and training with our neighbours will go some way towards redressing imbalances that currently exist. A further very positive benefit of GAELIC is the enthusiastic communication happening amongst staff at many levels in libraries - staff who in the past rarely had the opportunity to meet their colleagues in other university and technikon libraries.

Conclusion

GAELIC is a wonderful resource, holding at least 40% of the information available in libraries in South Africa. How can we best utilise it? By enabling a user to search firstly the local online catalogue (or OPAC) at his or her institution, then, at the touch of a key, to search the online database of the GAELIC union catalogue of over five million titles, seven million volumes, and 20 000 current periodical titles, and be informed of the circulation status of the item he or she is looking for.

However GAELIC is more than an information source, more than a group of cooperating libraries. It is a pooling of the resources and energies of participants into an exciting new entity – our regional virtual library. We face many challenges, and no doubt many problems too. We have learned that one can never be too democratic. We have learned how important it is to achieve consensus, to give every member an opportunity to voice opinions, to be sensitive to those of our members who were disadvantaged in the past, and to keep the momentum and drive going. But we are an enthusiastic and committed team, and we feel certain that we have a better chance of survival in GAELIC than out of it!

Acronyms and abbreviations

FOTIM	Foundation of Tertiary Institutions in the Northern Metropolis
FRELICO	Free State Libraries and Information Consortium
GAELIC	Gauteng and Environs Library Consortium
IT	Information technology
III	Innovative Interfaces Inc.
Mb	Megabit
OCLC	Online Computer Library Center
OPAC	Online public access catalogue
RFI	Request for information
SABINET	South African Bibliographic and Information Network
SAMARC	South African machine readable cataloguing
UNISA	University of South Africa
USMARC	United States machine readable cataloguing
VAT	Value added tax

Back to contents

Last edited by J.F. 23rd June. 1998.